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ART. VIII.—*Histoire des Idées Morales et Politiques en France au XVIII^{me} Siècle.* Par M. JULES BARNI, Professeur à l'Académie de Genève. Tome II. Paris. 1867.

“WE have had the great professor and founder of the philosophy of Vanity in England. As I had good opportunities of knowing his proceedings almost from day to day, he left no doubt in my mind that he entertained no principle either to influence his heart or to guide his understanding but vanity ; with this vice he was possessed to a degree little short of madness. Benevolence to the whole species, and want of feeling for every individual with whom the professors come in contact, form the character of the new philosophy. Setting up for an unsocial independence, this their hero of vanity refuses the just price of common labor, as well as the tribute which opulence owes to genius, and which, when paid, honors the giver and the receiver, and then pleads his beggary as an excuse for his crimes. He melts with tenderness for those only who touch him by the remotest relation, and then, without one natural pang, casts away, as a sort of offal and excrement, the spawn of his disgusting amours, and sends his children to the hospital of foundlings. The bear loves, licks, and forms her young ; but bears are not philosophers.”

This was Burke's opinion of the only contemporary who can be said to rival him in fervid and sustained eloquence, to surpass him in grace and persuasiveness of style. Perhaps we should have been more thankful to him if he had left us instead a record of those “proceedings almost from day to day” which he had such “good opportunities of knowing,” but it probably never entered his head that posterity might care as much about the doings of the citizen of Geneva as about the sayings of even a British Right Honorable. Vanity eludes recognition by its victims in more shapes, and more pleasing, than any other passion, and perhaps had Mr. Burke been able imaginatively to translate Swiss Jean Jacques into Irish Edmund, he would have found no juster equivalent for the obnoxious trisyllable than “righteous self-esteem.” For Burke was himself also, in the subtler sense of the word, a sentimentalist, that is, a man

who took what would now be called an æsthetic view of morals and politics. No man who ever wrote English, except perhaps Mr. Ruskin, more habitually mistook his own personal likes and dislikes, tastes and distastes, for general principles, and this, it may be suspected, is the secret of all merely eloquent writing. He hints at madness as an explanation of Rousseau, and it is curious enough that Mr. Buckle was fain to explain *him* in the same way. It is not, we confess, a solution that we find very satisfactory in this latter case. His fury against the French Revolution was nothing more than was natural to a desperate man in self-defence. It was his own life, or, at least, all that made life dear to him, that was in danger. He had all that abstract political wisdom which may be naturally secreted from a magnanimous nature and a sensitive temperament, absolutely none of that rough-and-tumble kind which is so needful for the conduct of affairs. Fastidiousness is only another form of egotism ; and all men who know not where to look for truth save in the narrow well of self will find their own image at the bottom, and mistake it for what they are seeking. Burke's hatred of Rousseau was genuine and instinctive. It was so genuine and so instinctive as no hatred can be but that of self, of our own weaknesses as we see them in another man. But there was also something deeper in it than this. There was mixed with it the natural dread in the political diviner of the political logician, — in the empirical, of the theoretic statesman. Burke, confounding the idea of society with the form of it then existing, would have preserved that as the only specific against anarchy. Rousseau, assuming that society as it then existed was but another name for anarchy, would have reconstituted it on an ideal basis. The one has left behind him some of the profoundest aphorisms of political wisdom ; the other, some of the clearest principles of political science. The one, clinging to Divine right, found in the fact that things were, a reason that they ought to be ; the other, aiming to solve the problem of the Divine order, would deduce from that abstraction alone the claim of anything to be at all. There seems a mere oppugnancy of nature between the two, and yet both were, in different ways, the dupes of their own imaginations.

Now let us hear the opinion of a philosopher who *was* a bear,

whether bears be philosophers or not. Boswell had a genuine relish for what was superior in any way, from genius to claret, and of course he did not let Rousseau escape him. "One evening at the Mitre, Johnson said sarcastically to me, 'It seems, sir, you have kept very good company abroad,—Rousseau and Wilkes!' I answered with a smile, 'My dear sir, you don't call Rousseau bad company; do you really think *him* a bad man?' JOHNSON. 'Sir, if you are talking jestingly of this, I don't talk with you. If you mean to be serious, I think him one of the worst of men, a rascal who ought to be hunted out of society, as he has been. Three or four nations have expelled him, and it is a shame that he is protected in this country. Rousseau, sir, is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation, than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have him work in the plantations.' " *We* were the plantations then, and Rousseau was destined to work there in another and much more wonderful fashion than the gruff old Ursa Major imagined. However, there is always a refreshing heartiness in his growl, a masculine bass with no snarl in it. The Doctor's logic is of that fine old crusted Port sort, the native manufacture of the British conservative mind. Three or four nations *have*, therefore England ought. A few years later, had the Doctor been living, if three or four nations had treated their kings as France did hers, would he have thought the *ergo* a very stringent one for England?

Mr. Burke, who could speak with studied respect of the Prince of Wales, and of his vices with that charity which thinketh no evil and can afford to think no evil of so important a living member of the British Constitution, surely could have had no unmixed moral repugnance for Rousseau's "disgustful amours." It was because they were *his* that they were so loathsome. Mr. Burke was a snob, though an inspired one. Dr. Johnson, the friend of that wretchedest of lewd fellows, Richard Savage, and of that gay man about town, Topham Beauclerk,—himself sprung from an amour that would have been disgusting had it not been royal,—must also have felt something more in respect of Rousseau than the mere repugnance of virtue for vice. We must sometimes allow to personal temperament

its right of peremptory challenge. Johnson had not that fine sensitiveness to the political atmosphere which made Burke presageful of coming tempest, but both of them felt that there was something dangerous in this man. Their dislike has in it somewhat of the energy of fear. Neither of them had the same feeling toward Voltaire, the man of supreme talent, but both felt that what Rousseau was possessed by was genius, with its terrible force either to attract or repel.

“By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.”

Burke and Johnson were both of them sincere men, both of them men of character as well as of intellectual force; and we cite their opinions of Rousseau with the respect which is due to an honest conviction which has apparent grounds for its adoption, whether we agree with it or no. But it strikes us as a little singular that one whose life was so full of moral inconsistency, whose character is so contemptible in many ways, in some we might almost say so revolting, should yet have exercised so deep and lasting an influence, and on minds so various, should still be an object of minute and earnest discussion, — that he should have had such vigor in his intellectual loins as to have been the father of Chateaubriand, Byron, Lamartine, George Sand, and many more in literature, in politics of Jefferson and Thomas Paine, — that the spots he had haunted should draw pilgrims so unlike as Gibbon and Napoleon, nay, should draw them still after the lapse of near a century. Surely there must have been a basis of sincerity in this man seldom matched, if it can prevail against so many reasons for repugnance, aversion, and even disgust. He could not have been the mere sentimentalist and rhetorician for which the rough-and-ready understanding would at first glance be inclined to condemn him. In a certain sense he was both of these, but he was something more. It will bring us a little nearer the point we are aiming at if we quote one other and more recent English opinion of him.

Mr. Thomas Moore, returning pleasantly in a travelling-carriage from a trip to Italy, in which he had never forgotten the poetical shop at home, but had carefully noted down all the pretty images that occurred to him for future use, — Mr.

Thomas Moore, on his way back from a visit to his noble friend Byron, at Venice, who had there been leading a life so gross as to be talked about, even amid the crash of Napoleon's fall, and who was just writing "Don Juan" for the improvement of the world, — Mr. Thomas Moore, fresh from the reading of Byron's Memoirs, which were so scandalous that, by some hocus-pocus, three thousand guineas found their way into his own pocket afterward for consenting to suppress them, — Mr. Thomas Moore, the *ci-devant* friend of the Prince Regent, and the author of Little's Poems, among other objects of pilgrimage, visits *Les Charmettes*, where Rousseau had lived with Madame de Warens. So good an opportunity for occasional verses was not to be lost, so good a text for a little virtuous moralizing not to be thrown away; and accordingly Mr. Moore pours out several pages of octosyllabic disgust at the sensuality of the dead man of genius. There was no horror for Byron. Toward him all was suavity and decorous *bienséance*. That lively sense of benefits to be received made the Irish Anacreon wink with both his little eyes. In the judgment of a liberal like Mr. Moore, were not the errors of a lord excusable? But with poor Rousseau the case was very different. The son of a watchmaker, an outcast from boyhood up, always on the perilous edge of poverty, — what right had he to indulge himself in any immoralities? So it is always with the sentimentalists. It is never the thing in itself that is bad or good, but the thing in its relation to some conventional and mostly selfish standard. Moore could be a moralist, in this case, without any trouble, and with the advantage of winning Lord Lansdowne's approval; he could write some graceful verses which everybody would buy, and for the rest it is not hard to be a stoic in eight-syllable measure and a travelling-carriage. The next dinner at Bowood will taste none the worse. Accordingly he speaks of

"The mire, the strife
And vanities of this man's life,
Who more than all that e'er have glowed
With fancy's flame (and it was his
In fullest warmth and radiance) showed
What an impostor Genius is;

How, with that strong mimetic art
Which forms its life and soul, it takes
All shapes of thought, all hues of heart,
Nor feels itself one throb it wakes ;
How, like a gem, its light may shine,
O'er the dark path by mortals trod,
Itself as mean a worm the while
As crawls at midnight o'er the sod ;

How, with the pencil hardly dry
From coloring up such scenes of love
And beauty as make young hearts sigh,
And dream and think through heaven they rove," &c., &c.

Very spirited, is it not? One has only to overlook a little threadbareness in the similes, and it is very good oratorical verse. But would we believe in it, we must never read Mr. Moore's own journal, and find out how thin a piece of veneering his own life was, — how he lived in sham till his very nature had become subdued to it, till he could persuade himself that a sham could be written into a reality, and actually made experiment thereof in his Diary.

One verse in this diatribe deserves a special comment, —

“What an impostor Genius is !”

In two respects there is nothing to be objected to in it. It is of eight syllables, and “is” rhymes unexceptionably with “his.” But is there the least filament of truth in it? We venture to assert, not the least. It was not Rousseau's genius that was an impostor. It was the one thing in him that was always true. We grant that, in allowing that a man has genius. Talent is that which is in a man's power; genius is that in whose power a man is. That is the very difference between them. We might turn the tables on Moore, the man of talent, and say truly enough, What an impostor talent is! Moore talks of the mimetic power with a total misapprehension of what it really is. The mimetic power had nothing whatever to do with the affair. Rousseau had none of it: Shakespeare had it in excess; but what difference would it make in our judgment of Hamlet or Othello if a manuscript of Shakespeare's memoirs should turn up, and we should find out that he had been a pitiful fellow? None in the world; for he is not a pro-

fessed moralist, and his life does not give the warrant to his words. But if Demosthenes, after all his Philippics, throws away his shield and runs, we feel the contemptibleness of the contradiction. With genius itself we never find any fault. It would be an over-nicety that would do that. We do not get invited to nectar and ambrosia so often that we think of grumbling and saying we have better at home. No; the same genius that mastered him who wrote the poem masters us in reading it, and we care for nothing outside the poem itself. How the author lived, what he wore, how he looked, — all that is mere gossip, about which we need not trouble ourselves. Whatever he was or did, somehow or other God let him be worthy to write *this*, and that is enough for us. We forgive everything to the genius; we are inexorable to the man. Shakespeare, Goethe, Burns, — what have their biographies to do with us? Genius is not a question of character. It may be sordid, like the lamp of Aladdin, in its externals; what care we, while the touch of it builds palaces for us, makes us rich as only men in dream-land are rich, and lords to the utmost bound of imagination? So, when people talk of the ungrateful way in which the world treats its geniuses, they speak unwisely. There is no work of genius which has not been the delight of mankind, no word of genius to which the human heart and soul have not, sooner or later, responded. But the man whom the genius takes possession of for its pen, for its trowel, for its pencil, for its chisel, *him* the world treats according to his deserts. Does Burns drink? It sets him to gauging casks of gin. For, remember, it is not to the practical world that the genius appeals; it *is* the practical world which judges of the man's fitness for its uses, and has a right so to judge. No amount of patronage could have made distilled liquors less toothsome to Robbie Burns, as no amount of them could make a Burns of the Ettrick Shepherd.

There is an old story in the *Gesta Romanorum* of a priest who was found fault with by one of his parishioners because his life was in painful discordance with his teaching. So one day he takes his critic out to a stream, and, giving him to drink of it, asks him if he does not find it sweet and pure water. The parishioner, having answered that it was, is taken

to the source, and finds that what had so refreshed him flowed from between the jaws of a dead dog. "Let this teach thee," said the priest, "that the very best doctrine may take its rise in a very impure and disgusting spring, and that excellent morals may be taught by a man who has no morals at all." It is easy enough to see the fallacy here. Had the man known beforehand from what a carrion fountain-head the stream issued, he could not have drunk of it without loathing. Had the priest merely bidden him to *look* at the stream and see how beautiful it was, instead of tasting it, it would have been quite another matter. And this is precisely the difference between what appeals to our æsthetic and to our moral sense, between what is judged of by the taste and the conscience.

It is when the sentimentalist turns preacher of morals that we investigate his character, and are justified in so doing. He may express as many and as delicate shades of feeling as he likes, — for this the sensibility of his organization perfectly fits him, no other person could do it so well, — but the moment he undertakes to establish his feeling as a rule of conduct, we ask at once how far are his own life and deed in accordance with what he preaches? For every man feels instinctively that all the beautiful sentiments in the world weigh less than a single lovely action; and that while tenderness of feeling and susceptibility to generous emotions are accidents of temperament, goodness is an achievement of the will and a quality of the life. Fine words, says our homely old proverb, better no parsnips; and if the question be how to render those vegetables palatable, an ounce of butter would be worth more than all the orations of Cicero. The only conclusive evidence of a man's sincerity is that he give *himself* for a principle. Words, money, all things else, are comparatively easy to give away; but when a man makes a gift of his daily life and practice, it is plain that the truth, whatever it may be, has taken possession of him. From that sincerity his words gain the force and pertinency of deeds, and his money is no longer the pale drudge 'twixt man and man, but, by a beautiful magic, what erewhile bore the image and superscription of Cæsar seems now to bear the image and superscription of God. It is thus that there is a genius for goodness, for magnanimity,

for self-sacrifice, as well as for creative art; and it is thus that by a more refined sort of Platonism the Infinite Beauty dwells in and shapes to its own likeness the soul which gives it body and individuality. But when Moore charges genius with being an impostor, the confusion of his ideas is pitiable. There is nothing so true, so sincere, so downright and forthright, as genius. It is always truer than the man himself is, greater than he. If Shakespeare the man had been as marvellous a creature as the genius that wrote his plays, that genius so comprehensive in its intelligence, so wise even in its play, that its clowns are moralists and philosophers, so penetrative that a single one of its phrases reveals to us the secret of our own character, would his contemporaries have left us so wholly without record of him as they have done, distinguishing him in no wise from his fellow-players?

Rousseau no doubt was weak, nay, more than that, was sometimes despicable, but yet is not fairly to be reckoned among the herd of sentimentalists. It is shocking that a man whose preaching made it fashionable for women of rank to nurse their own children should have sent his own, as soon as born, to the foundling hospital, still more shocking that, in a note to his *Discours sur l'Inégalité*, he should speak of this crime as one of the consequences of our social system. But for all that, there was a faith and an ardor of conviction in him that distinguish him from most of the writers of his time. Nor were his practice and his preaching always inconsistent. He contrived to pay regularly, whatever his own circumstances were, a pension of one hundred *livres* a year to a maternal aunt who had been kind to him in childhood. Nor was his asceticism a sham. He might have turned his gift into laced coats and *châteaux* as easily as Voltaire, had he not held it too sacred to be bartered away in any such losing exchange.

But what is worthy of especial remark is this,—that in nearly all that he wrote his leading object was the good of his kind, and that through all the vicissitudes of a life which illness, sensibility of temperament, and the approaches of insanity rendered wretched,—the associate of infidels, the foundling child, as it were, of an age without belief, least of all in itself,—he professed and evidently felt deeply a faith in the

goodness both of man and of God. There is no such thing as scoffing in his writings. On the other hand, there is no stereotyped morality. He does not ignore the existence of scepticism; he recognizes its existence in his own nature, meets it frankly face to face, and makes it confess that there are things in the teaching of Christ that are deeper than its doubt. The influence of his early education at Geneva is apparent here. An intellect so acute as his, trained in the school of Calvin in a republic where theological discussion was as much the amusement of the people as the opera was at Paris, could not fail to be a good logician. He had the fortitude to follow his logic wherever it led him. If the very impressibility of character which quickened his perception of the beauties of nature, and made him alive to the charm of music and musical expression, prevented him from being in the highest sense an original writer, and if his ideas were mostly suggested to him by books, yet the clearness, consecutiveness, and eloquence with which he stated and enforced them made them his own. There was at least that original fire in him which could fuse them and run them in a novel mould. His power lay in this very ability of manipulating the thoughts of others. Fond of paradox he doubtless was, but he had a way of putting things that arrested attention and excited thought.

It was, perhaps, this very sensibility to the surrounding atmosphere of feeling and speculation, which made Rousseau more directly influential on contemporary thought (or perhaps we should say sentiment) than any writer of his time. And this is rarely consistent with enduring greatness in literature. It forces us to remember, against our will, the oratorical character of his works. They were all pleas, and he a great advocate, with Europe in the jury-box. Enthusiasm begets enthusiasm, eloquence produces conviction for the moment, but it is only by truth to nature and the everlasting intuitions of mankind that those abiding influences are won that enlarge from generation to generation. Rousseau was in many respects — as great pleaders always are — a man of the day, who must needs become a mere name to posterity, yet he could not but have had in him some not inconsiderable share of that principle by which man eternizes himself. For it is only to such that the night

cometh not in which no man shall work, and he is still operative both in politics and literature by the principles he formulated or the emotions to which he gave a voice so piercing and so sympathetic.

In judging Rousseau, it would be unfair not to take note of the malarious atmosphere in which he grew up. The constitution of his mind was thus early infected with a feverish taint that made him shiveringly sensitive to a temperature which hardier natures found bracing. To him this rough world was but too literally a rack. Good-humored Mother Nature commonly imbeds the nerves of her children in a padding of self-conceit that serves as a buffer against the ordinary shocks to which even a life of routine is liable, and it would seem at first sight as if Rousseau had been better cared for than usual in this regard. But as his self-conceit was enormous, so was the reaction from it proportionate, and the fretting suspiciousness of temper, sure mark of an unsound mind, which rendered him incapable of intimate friendship, while passionately longing for it, became inevitably, when turned inward, a tormenting self-distrust. To dwell in unrealities is the doom of the sentimentalist; but it should not be forgotten that the same fitful intensity of emotion which makes them real as the means of elation, gives them substance also for torture. Too irritably jealous to endure the rude society of men, he steeped his senses in the enervating incense that women are only too ready to burn. If their friendship be a safeguard to the other sex, their homage is fatal to all but the strongest, and Rousseau was weak by inheritance and early training. His father was one of those feeble creatures for whom a fine phrase could always satisfactorily fill the void that non-performance leaves behind it. If he neglected duty, he made up for it by that cultivation of the finer sentiments of our common nature which waters flowers of speech with the brineless tears of a flabby remorse, without one fibre of resolve in it, and which impoverishes the character in proportion as it enriches the vocabulary. He was a very Apicius in that digestible kind of woe which makes no man leaner, and had a favorite receipt for cooking you up a sorrow *à la douleur in-assouvie* that had just enough delicious sharpness in it to bring

tears into the eyes by tickling the palate. "When he said to me, 'Jean Jacques, let us speak of thy mother,' I said to him, 'Well, father, we are going to weep, then?'" and this word alone drew tears from him. 'Ah!' said he, groaning, 'give her back to me, console me for her, fill the void she has left in my soul!'" Alas! in such cases, the void she leaves is only that she found. The grief that seeks any other than its own society will ere long want an object. This admirable parent allowed his son to become an outcast at sixteen, without any attempt to reclaim him, in order to enjoy unmolested a petty inheritance to which the boy was entitled in right of his mother. "This conduct," Rousseau tells us, "of a father whose tenderness and virtue were so well known to me, caused me to make reflections on myself which have not a little contributed to make my heart sound. I drew from it this great maxim of morals, the only one perhaps serviceable in practice, to avoid situations which put our duties in opposition to our interest, and which show us our own advantage in the wrong of another, sure that in such situations, *however sincere may be one's love of virtue*, it sooner or later grows weak without our perceiving it, *and that we become unjust and wicked in action without having ceased to be just and good in soul.*"

This maxim may do for that "fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks its adversary," which Milton could not praise,—that is, for a manhood whose distinction it is not to be manly,—but it is chiefly worth notice as being the characteristic doctrine of sentimentalism. This disjoining of deed from will, of practice from theory, is to put asunder what God has joined by an indissoluble sacrament. The soul must be tainted before the action becomes corrupt; and there is no self-delusion more fatal than that which makes the conscience dreamy with the anodyne of lofty sentiments, while the life is grovelling and sensual,—witness Coleridge. In his case we feel something like disgust. But where, as in his son Hartley, there is hereditary infirmity, where the man sees the principle that might rescue him slip from the clutch of a nerveless will, like a rope through the fingers of a drowning man, and the confession of faith is the moan of despair, there is room for no harsher feeling than

pity. Rousseau showed through life a singular proneness for being convinced by his own eloquence ; he was always his own first convert ; and this reconciles his power as a writer with his weakness as a man. He and all like him mistake emotion for conviction, velleity for resolve, the brief eddy of sentiment for the midcurrent of ever-gathering faith in duty that draws to itself all the affluents of conscience and will, and gives continuity of purpose to life. They are like men who love the stimulus of being under conviction, as it is called, who, forever getting religion, never get capital enough to retire upon and spend for their own need and the common service.

The sentimentalist is the spixitual hypochondriac, with whom fancies become facts, while facts are a discomfort because they will not be evaporated into fancy. In his eyes, Theory is too fine a dame to confess even a country-cousinship with coarse-handed Practice, whose homely ways would disconcert her artificial world. The very susceptibility that makes him quick to feel, makes him also incapable of deep and durable feeling. He loves to think he suffers, and keeps a pet sorrow, a blue-devil familiar, that goes with him everywhere, like Paracelsus's black dog. He takes good care, however, that it shall not be the true sulphurous article that sometimes takes a fancy to fly away with his conjurer. René says, "In my madness I had gone so far as even to wish I might experience a misfortune, so that my suffering might at least have a real object." But no ; selfishness is only active egotism, and there is nothing and nobody, with a single exception, which this sort of creature will not sacrifice, rather than give any other than an imaginary pang to his idol. Vicarious pain he is not unwilling to endure, nay, will even commit suicide by proxy, like the German poet who let his wife kill herself to give him a sensation. Had young Jerusalem been anything like Goethe's portrait of him in Werther, he would have taken very good care not to blow out the brains which he would have thought only too precious. Real sorrows are uncomfortable things, but purely æsthetic ones are by no means unpleasant, and we have always fancied the handsome young Wolfgang writing those distracted letters to Auguste Stolberg with a looking-glass in front of him to give back an image of his desolation, and finding it rather

pleasant than otherwise to shed the tear of sympathy with self that would seem so bitter to his fair correspondent. The tears that have real salt in them will keep ; they are the difficult, manly tears that are shed in secret ; but the pathos soon evaporates from that fresh-water with which a man can bedew a dead donkey in public, while his wife is having a good cry over his neglect of her at home. We do not think the worse of Goethe for hypothetically desolating himself in the fashion aforesaid, for with many constitutions it is as purely natural a crisis as dentition, which the stronger worry through, and turn out very sensible, agreeable fellows. But where there is an arrest of development, and the heartbreak of the patient is audibly prolonged through life, we have a spectacle which the toughest heart would wish to get as far away from as possible.

We would not be supposed to overlook the distinction, too often lost sight of, between sentimentalism and sentiment, the latter being a very excellent thing in its way, as genuine things are apt to be. Sentiment is intellectualized emotion, emotion precipitated, as it were, in pretty crystals by the fancy. This is the delightful staple of the poets of social life like Horace and Béranger, or Thackeray, when he too rarely played with verse. It puts into words for us that decorous average of feeling to the expression of which society can consent without danger of being indiscreetly moved. It is excellent for people who are willing to save their souls alive to any extent that shall not be discomposing. It is even satisfying till some deeper experience has given us a hunger which what we so glibly call "the world" cannot sate, just as a water-ice is nourishment enough to a man who has had his dinner. It is the sufficing lyrical interpreter of those lighter hours that should make part of every healthy man's day, and is noxious only when it palls men's appetite for the truly profound poetry which is very passion of very soul sobered by afterthought and embodied in eternal types by imagination. True sentiment is emotion ripened by a slow ferment of the mind and qualified to an agreeable temperance by that taste which is the conscience of polite society. But the sentimentalist always insists on taking his emotion neat, and, as his sense gradually deadens to the stimulus, increases his dose till he ends in a kind of

moral deliquium. At first the debaucher, he becomes at last the victim of his sensations.

Among the ancients we find no trace of sentimentalism. Their masculine mood both of body and mind left no room for it, and hence the bracing quality of their literature compared with that of recent times, its tonic property, that seems almost too astringent to palates relaxed by a daintier diet. The first great example of the degenerate modern tendency was Petrarch, who may be said to have given it impulse and direction. A more perfect specimen of the type has not since appeared. An intellectual voluptuary, a moral *dilettante*, the first instance of that character, since too common, the gentleman in search of a sensation, seeking a solitude at Vaucluse because it made him more likely to be in demand at Avignon, praising philosophic poverty with a sharp eye to the next rich benefice in the gift of his patron, commending a good life but careful first of a good living, happy only in seclusion but making a dangerous journey to enjoy the theatrical show of a coronation in the Capitol, cherishing a fruitless passion which broke his heart three or four times a year and yet could not make an end of him till he had reached the ripe age of seventy and survived his mistress a quarter of a century, — surely a more exquisite perfection of inconsistency would be hard to find.

When Petrarch returned from his journey into the North of Europe in 1332, he balanced the books of his unrequited passion, and, finding that he had now been in love seven years, thought the time had at last come to call deliberately on Death. Had Death taken him at his word, he would have protested that he was only in fun. For we find him always taking good care of an excellent constitution, avoiding the plague with commendable assiduity, and in the very year when he declares it absolutely essential to his peace of mind to die for good and all, taking refuge in the fortress of Capranica, from a wholesome dread of having his throat cut by robbers. There is such a difference between dying in a sonnet with a cambric handkerchief at one's eyes, and the prosaic reality of demise certified in the parish register! Practically it is inconvenient to be dead. Among other things, it puts an end to the manufacture of sonnets. But there seems to

have been an excellent understanding between Petrarch and Death, for he was brought to that grisly monarch's door so often, that, otherwise, nothing short of a miracle or the nine lives of that animal whom love also makes lyrical could have saved him. "I consent," he cries, "to live and die in Africa among its serpents, upon Caucasus, or Atlas, if, while I live, to breathe a pure air, and after my death a little corner of earth where to bestow my body, may be allowed me. This is all I ask, but this I cannot obtain. Doomed always to wander, and to be a stranger everywhere, O Fortune, Fortune, fix me at last to some one spot! I do not covet thy favors. Let me enjoy a tranquil poverty, let me pass in this retreat the few days that remain to me!" The pathetic stop of Petrarch's poetical organ was one he could pull out at pleasure, — and indeed we soon learn to distrust literary tears, as the cheap subterfuge for want of real feeling with natures of this quality. Solitude with him was but the pseudonyme of notoriety. Poverty was the archdeaconry of Parma, with other ecclesiastical pickings. During his retreat at Vacluse, in the very height of that divine sonnetteering love of Laura, of that sensitive purity which called Avignon Babylon, and rebuked the sinfulness of Clement, he was himself begetting that kind of children which we spell with a *b*. We believe that, if Messer Francesco had been present when the woman was taken in adultery, he would have flung the first stone without the slightest feeling of inconsistency, nay, with a sublime sense of virtue. The truth is, that it made very little difference to him what sort of proper sentiment he expressed, provided he could do it elegantly and with unction.

Would any one feel the difference between his faint abstractions and the Platonism of a powerful nature fitted alike for the withdrawal of ideal contemplation and for breasting the storms of life, — would any one know how wide a depth divides a noble friendship based on sympathy of pursuit and aspiration, on that mutual help which souls capable of self-sustainment are the readiest to give or to take, and a simulated passion, true neither to the spiritual nor the sensual part of man, — let him compare the sonnets of Petrarch with those which Michel Angelo addressed to Vittoria Colonna. In them the airiest pinnacles of

sentiment and speculation are buttressed with solid mason-work of thought, and of an actual, not fancied experience, and the depth of feeling is measured by the sobriety and reserve of expression, while in Petrarch's all ingenuousness is frittered away into ingenuity. Both are cold, but the coldness of the one is self-restraint, while the other chills with pretence of warmth. In Michel Angelo's, you feel the great architect; in Petrarch's, the artist who can best realize his conception in the limits of a cherry-stone. And yet this man influenced literature longer and more widely than almost any other in modern times. So great is the charm of elegance, so unreal is the larger part of what is written!

Certainly we do not mean to say that a work of art should be looked at by the light of the artist's biography, or measured by our standard of his character. Nor do we reckon what was genuine in Petrarch—his love of letters, his refinement, his skill in the superficial graces of language, that rhetorical art by which the music of words supplants their meaning, and the verse moulds the thought instead of being plastic to it—after any such fashion. We have no ambition for that character of *valet de chambre* which is said to disenchant the most heroic figures into mere every-day personages, for it implies a mean soul no less than a servile condition. But we have a right to demand a certain amount of reality, however small, in the emotion of a man who makes it his business to endeavor at exciting our own. We have a privilege of nature to shiver before a painted flame, how cunningly soever the colors be laid on. Yet our love of minute biographical detail, our desire to make ourselves spies upon the men of the past, seems so much of an instinct in us, that we must look for the spring of it in human nature, and that somewhat deeper than mere curiosity or love of gossip. It would seem to arise from what must be considered on the whole a creditable feeling, namely, that we value character more than any amount of talent,—the skill to be something, above that of doing anything but the best of its kind. The highest creative genius, and that only, is privileged from arrest by this personality, for there the thing produced is altogether disengaged from the producer. But in natures incapable of this escape from themselves, the author is in-

evitably mixed with his work, and we have a feeling that the amount of his sterling character is the security for the notes he issues. Especially we feel so when truth to self, which is always self-forgetful, and not truth to nature, makes an essential part of the value of what is offered us ; as where a man undertakes to narrate personal experience or to enforce a dogma. This is particularly true as respects sentimentalists, because of their intrusive self-consciousness ; for there is no more universal characteristic of human nature than the instinct of men to apologize to themselves for themselves, and to justify personal failings by generalizing them into universal laws. A man would be the keenest devil's advocate against himself, were it not that he has always taken a retaining fee for the defence ; for we think that the indirect and mostly unconscious pleas in abatement which we read between the lines in the works of many authors are oftener written to set themselves right in their own eyes than in those of the world. And in the real life of the sentimentalist it is the same. He is under the wretched necessity of keeping up, at least in public, the character he has assumed, till he at last reaches that last shift of bankrupt self-respect, to play the hypocrite with himself. Lamartine, after passing round the hat in Europe and America, takes to his bed from wounded pride when the French Senate votes him a subsidy, and sheds tears of humiliation. Ideally, he resents it ; in practical coin, he will accept the shame without a wry face.

George Sand, speaking of Rousseau's "Confessions," says that an autobiographer always makes himself the hero of his own novel, and cannot help idealizing, even if he would. But the weak point of all sentimentalists is that they always have been, and always continue under every conceivable circumstance to be, their own ideals, whether they are writing their own lives or no. Rousseau opens his book with the statement : "I am not made like any of those I have seen ; I venture to believe myself unlike any that exists. If I am not worth more, at least I am different." O exquisite cunning of self-flattery ! It is this very imagined difference that makes us worth more in our own foolish sight. For while all men are apt to think, or to persuade themselves that they think, all

other men their accomplices in vice or weakness, they are not difficult of belief that they are singular in any quality or talent on which they hug themselves. More than this; people who are truly original are the last to find it out, for the moment we become conscious of a virtue it has left us or is getting ready to go. Originality does not consist in a fidgety assertion of self-hood, but in the faculty of getting rid of it altogether, that the truer genius of the man, which commences with universal nature and with other souls through a common sympathy with that, may take all his powers wholly to itself, — and the truly original man could no more be jealous of his peculiar gift, than the grass could take credit to itself for being green. What is the reason that all children are geniuses, (though they contrive so soon to outgrow that dangerous quality,) except that they never cross-examine themselves on the subject? The moment that process begins, their speech loses its gift of unexpectedness, and they become as tediously impertinent as the rest of us.

If there never was any one like him, if he constituted a genus in himself, to what end write confessions in which no other human being could ever be in a condition to take the least possible interest? All men are interested in Montaigne in proportion as all men find more of themselves in him, and all men see but one image in the glass which the greatest of poets holds up to nature, an image which at once startles and charms them with its familiarity. Fabulists always endow their animals with the passions and desires of men. But if an ox could dictate his confessions, what glimmer of understanding should we find in those bovine confidences, unless on some theory of pre-existence, some blank misgiving of a creature moving about in worlds not realized? The truth is, that we recognize the common humanity of Rousseau in the very weakness that betrayed him into this conceit of himself; we find he is just like the rest of us in this very assumption of essential difference, for among all animals man is the only one who tries to pass for more than he is, and so involves himself in the condemnation of seeming less.

But it would be sheer waste of time to hunt Rousseau through all his doublings of inconsistency, and run him to earth in every new paradox. His first two books attacked, one of

them literature, and the other society. But this did not prevent him from being diligent with his pen, nor from availing himself of his credit with persons who enjoyed all the advantages of that inequality whose evils he had so pointedly exposed. Indeed, it is curious how little practical communism there has been, how few professors it has had who would not have gained by a general dividend. It is perhaps no frantic effort of generosity in a philosopher with ten crowns in his pocket when he offers to make common stock with a neighbor who has ten thousand of yearly income, nor is it an uncommon thing to see such theories knocked clean out of a man's head by the descent of a thumping legacy. But, consistent or not, Rousseau remains permanently interesting as the highest and most perfect type of the sentimentalist of genius. His was perhaps the acutest mind that was ever mated with an organization so diseased, the brain most far-reaching in speculation that ever kept itself steady and worked out its problems amid such disordered tumult of the nerves. His letter to the Archbishop of Paris, admirable for its lucid power and soberness of tone, and his *Rousseau juge de Jean Jacques*, which no man can read and believe him to have been sane, show him to us in his strength and weakness, and give us a more charitable, let us hope therefore a truer, notion of him than his own apology for himself. That he was a man of genius appears unmistakably in his impressibility by the deeper meaning of the epoch in which he lived. Before an eruption, clouds steeped through and through with electric life gather over the crater, as if in sympathy and expectation. As the mountain heaves and cracks, these vapory masses are seamed with fire, as if they felt and answered the dumb agony that is struggling for utterance below. Just such flashes of eager sympathetic fire break continually from the cloudy volumes of Rousseau, the result at once and the warning of that convulsion of which Paris was to be the crater and all Europe to feel the spasm. There are symptoms enough elsewhere of that want of faith in the existing order which made the Revolution inevitable,—even so shallow an observer as Horace Walpole could forebode it as early as 1765,—but Rousseau more than all others is the unconscious expression of the groping after something radically new, the instinct

for a change that should be organic and pervade every fibre of the social and political body. Freedom of thought owes far more to the jester Voltaire, who also had his solid kernel of earnest, than to the sombre Genevese, whose earnestness is of the deadly kind. Yet, for good or evil, the latter was the father of modern democracy, and without him our Declaration of Independence would have wanted some of those sentences in which the immemorial longings of the poor and the dreams of solitary enthusiasts were at last affirmed as axioms in the manifesto of a nation, so that all the world might hear.

Though Rousseau, like many other fanatics, had a remarkable vein of common sense in him, (witness his remarks on duelling, on landscape-gardening, on French poetry, and much of his thought on education,) we cannot trace many practical results to his teaching, least of all in politics. For the great difficulty with his system, if system it may be called, is, that, while it professes to follow nature, it not only assumes as a starting-point that the individual man may be made over again, but proceeds to the conclusion that man himself, that human nature, must be made over again, and governments remodelled on a purely theoretic basis. But when something like an experiment in this direction was made in 1789, not only did it fail as regarded man in general, but even as regards the particular variety of man that inhabited France. The Revolution accomplished many changes, and beneficent ones, but it left France peopled, not by a new race without traditions, but by Frenchmen. Still, there could not but be a wonderful force in the words of a man who, above all others, had the secret of making abstractions glow with his own fervor; and his ideas — dispersed now in the atmosphere of thought — have influenced, perhaps still continue to influence, speculative minds, which prefer swift and sure generalization to hesitating and doubtful experience.

Rousseau has, in one respect, been utterly misrepresented and misunderstood. Even Chateaubriand most unfilially classes him and Voltaire together. It appears to us that the inmost core of his being was religious. Had he remained in the Catholic Church, he might have been a saint. Had he come earlier, he might have founded an order. His was pre-

cisely the nature on which religious enthusiasm takes the strongest hold, — a temperament which finds a sensuous delight in spiritual things, and satisfies its craving for excitement with celestial debauch. He had not the iron temper of a great reformer and organizer like Knox, who, true Scotchman that he was, found a way to weld this world and the other together in a cast-iron creed ; but he had as much as any man ever had that gift of a great preacher to make the oratorical fervor which persuades himself while it lasts into the abiding conviction of his hearers. That very persuasion of his that the soul could remain pure while the life was corrupt, is not unexampled among men who have left holier names than he. His “Confessions,” also, would assign him to that class with whom the religious sentiment is strong, and the moral nature weak. They are apt to believe that they may, as special pleaders say, confess and avoid. Hawthorne has admirably illustrated this in the penance of Mr. Dimmesdale. With all the soil that is upon Rousseau, we cannot help looking on him as one capable beyond any in his generation of being divinely possessed ; and if it happened otherwise, when we remember the much that hindered and the little that helped in a life and time like his, we shall be much readier to pity than to condemn. It was his very fitness for being something better that makes him able to shock us so with what in too many respects he unhappily was. Less gifted, he had been less hardly judged. More than any other of the sentimentalists, except possibly Sterne, he had in him a staple of sincerity. Compared with Chateaubriand, he is honesty, compared with Lamartine, he is manliness itself. His nearest congener in our own tongue is Cowper.

In the whole school there is a sickly taint. The strongest mark which Rousseau has left upon literature is a sensibility to the picturesque in Nature, not with Nature as a strengthener and consoler, a wholesome tonic for a mind ill at ease with itself, but with Nature as a kind of feminine echo to the mood, flattering it with sympathy rather than correcting it with rebuke or lifting it away from its unmanly depression, as in the wholesomer fellow-feeling of Wordsworth. They seek in her an accessory, and not a reproof. It is less a sympathy with Nature than a sympathy with ourselves as we compel her to reflect

us. It is solitude, Nature for her estrangement from man, not for her companionship with him, — it is desolation and ruin, Nature as she has triumphed over man, — with which this order of mind seeks communion and in which it finds solace. It is with the hostile and destructive power of matter, and not with the spirit of life and renewal that dwells in it, that they ally themselves. And in human character it is the same. St. Preux, René, Werther, Manfred, Quasimodo, they are all anomalies, distortions, ruins, — so much easier is it to caricature life from our own sickly conception of it, than to paint it in its noble simplicity ; so much cheaper is unreality than truth.

Every man is conscious that he leads two lives, — the one trivial and ordinary, the other sacred and recluse ; one which he carries to society and the dinner-table, the other in which his youth and aspiration survive for him, and which is a confidence between himself and God. Both may be equally sincere, and there need be no contradiction between them, any more than in a healthy man between soul and body. If the higher life be real and earnest, its result, whether in literature or affairs, will be real and earnest too. But no man can produce great things who is not thoroughly sincere in dealing with himself, who would not exchange the finest show for the poorest reality, who does not so love his work that he is not only glad to give himself for it, but finds rather a gain than a sacrifice in the surrender. The sentimentalist does not think of what he does so much as of what the world will think of what he does. He translates should into would, looks upon the spheres of duty and beauty as alien to each other, and can never learn how life rounds itself to a noble completeness between these two opposite but mutually sustaining poles of what we long for and what we must.

Did Rousseau, then, lead a life of this quality ? Perhaps, when we consider the contrast which every man who looks backward must feel between the life he planned and the life which circumstance within him and without him has made for him, we should rather ask, Was this the life he meant to lead ? Perhaps, when we take into account his faculty of self-deception, — it may be no greater than our own, — we should ask, Was this the life he believed he led ? Have we any right to judge

this man after our blunt English fashion, and condemn him, as we are wont to do, on the finding of a jury of average householders? Is French reality precisely our reality? Could we tolerate tragedy in rhymed alexandrines, instead of blank verse? The whole life of Rousseau is pitched on this heroic key, and for the most trivial occasion he must be ready with the sublime sentiments that are supposed to suit him rather than it. It is one of the most curious features of the sentimental ailment, that, while it shuns the contact of men, it courts publicity. In proportion as solitude and communion with self lead the sentimentalist to exaggerate the importance of his own personality, he comes to think that the least event connected with it is of consequence to his fellow-men. If he change his shirt, he would have mankind aware of it. Victor Hugo, the greatest living representative of the class, considers it necessary to let the world know by letter from time to time his opinions on every conceivable subject about which it is not asked nor is of the least value unless we concede to him an immediate inspiration. We men of colder blood, in whom self-consciousness takes the form of pride, and who have deified *mauvaise honte* as if our defect were our virtue, find it especially hard to understand that artistic impulse of more southern races to *pose* themselves properly on every occasion, and not even to die without some tribute of deference to the taste of the world they are leaving. Was not even mighty Cæsar's last thought of his drapery? Let us not condemn Rousseau for what seems to us the indecent exposure of himself in his "Confessions."

Those who allow an oratorical and purely conventional side disconnected with our private understanding of the facts, and to life, in which everything has a parliamentary sense wholly where truth is made subservient to the momentary exigencies of eloquence, should be charitable to Rousseau. While we encourage a distinction which establishes two kinds of truth, one for the world, and another for the conscience, while we take pleasure in a kind of speech that has no relation to the real thought of speaker or hearer, but to the rostrum only, we must not be hasty to condemn a sentimentalism which we do our best to foster. We listen in public with the gravity of augurs to what we smile at when we meet a brother adept. France is the na-

tive land of eulogy, of truth padded out to the size and shape demanded by *comme-il-faut*. The French Academy has, perhaps, done more harm by the vogue it has given to this style, than it has done good by its literary purism, for the best purity of a language depends on the limpidity of its source in veracity of thought. Rousseau was in many respects a typical Frenchman, and it is not to be wondered at if he too often fell in with the fashion of saying what was expected of him and what he thought due to the situation, rather than what would have been true to his inmost consciousness. Perhaps we should allow something also to the influence of a Calvinistic training, which certainly helps men who have the least natural tendency towards it to set faith above works, and to persuade themselves of the efficacy of an inward grace to effect an outward and visible defection from it.

As the sentimentalist always takes a fanciful, sometimes an unreal, life for an ideal one, it would be too much to say that Rousseau was a man of earnest convictions. But he was a man of fitfully intense ones, as suited so mobile a temperament, and his writings, more than those of any other of his tribe, carry with them that persuasion that was in him while he wrote. In them at least he is as consistent as a man who admits new ideas can ever be. The children of his brain he never abandoned, but clung to them with paternal fidelity. Intellectually he was true and fearless ; constitutionally, timid, contradictory, and weak ; but never, if we understand him rightly, false. He was a little too credulous of sonorous sentiment, but he was never, like Chateaubriand or Lamartine, the lackey of fine phrases. If, as some fanciful physiologists have assumed, there be a masculine and feminine lobe of the brain, it would seem that in men of sentimental turn the masculine half fell in love with and made an idol of the other, obeying and admiring all the pretty whims of this *folle du logis*. In Rousseau the mistress had some noble elements of character, and less taint of the *demi-monde* than is visible in more recent cases of the same illicit relation.